

Rolesville Middle School
4700 Burlington Mills Rd.
Rolesville, NC 27571
919-570-2260



November 26, 2018

Dear Track 1 Eighth Grade Parents,

We are excited to announce that beginning January 2, 2019, Mrs. Houser and Mr. Cancellieri will be shifting their classroom grading systems to **promote student growth and independence**. This practice is often called the “gradeless” classroom because grades on individual assignments are replaced with feedback from the teacher. Students are taught to act on this feedback to improve their mastery of the course content, and are encouraged to see their learning as a continuous process of improvement. Students collect samples of their work throughout each quarter in a digital portfolio and then use that work to show evidence of their mastery at the end of the quarter. By reflecting on their progress and meeting with the teacher, **students** identify what grade they have earned for that period.

The reason for this change is simple: the current system is not working for most students. Many students are more focused on their letter grade than on their learning. They see each assignment as an isolated challenge, rather than a step toward mastery. When teachers provide feedback to students on their work, there is little incentive for students to act on this feedback and move forward because many students are singularly concerned with their grade. In the words of one academic researcher, “When a grade is put on student work, learning stops.” Providing only feedback and no grade has been shown to increase student learning by more than 30%.

More importantly, students are becoming **more active participants in their own learning**. Rather than seeing the teacher as the only judge of their work, they begin to see themselves as valuable decision-makers in the learning process. With guidance from the teacher, students plot their own progress from assignment to assignment and can witness their own growth, reinforcing the growth mindset that we know leads to successful adults. The current grading system was designed to create the obedient factory workers of the last century, not the independent, creative problem solvers that modern workplaces are looking for.

We know that this transition will initially be a challenge for students, teachers, and parents. We will be communicating with you to ensure that your questions and concerns are addressed. We hope that you will ask questions of your student to help them see the importance of learning, not just the letter or number earned. PowerSchool will still show whether your student has turned in an assignment, and you will receive an indication of whether their work is at grade-level or not. Our hope is that this system will provide more information to you as a parent than the previous letter grade did, allowing you to better support learning at home.

We also invite you to a brief question-and-answer session at the end of the RMS Curriculum Night on November 29 at 6:40 PM. Mrs. Houser and Mr. Cancellieri will be available to help clarify these changes and we welcome your feedback. As always, you are also encouraged to send your questions and concerns via email or through the Remind system. In the meantime, please see the back of this letter for the answers to some common questions about the “Gradeless Classroom”.

Best wishes,

Amy Houser
ahouser@wcpss.net

Paul Cancellieri
pcancellieri@wcpss.net

Gradeless Classroom F.A.Q.

Q: Will my student earn grades at all?

A: Yes, at the end of the quarter each student will earn a letter grade that matches their learning from the quarter. Students will work with the teacher to use evidence from the quarter to determine this grade.

Q: How will I know how well my student is doing during the quarter?

A: Using PowerSchool, you will be able to monitor their work, seeing what is missing and what was turned in late. Students will receive feedback on each assignment to help them gauge their performance and encourage second attempts that show more mastery. Each assignment will also be marked with Exceeded Expectations, Met Expectations, or Did Not Meet Expectations to help you and your child understand the quality of their submitted work.

Q: If it is so beneficial to student learning, why is this change only happening in the Science and Social Studies classes?

A: WCPSS has introduced new Math and Language Arts curricula this year and we did not want to compound the challenge of this change for teachers with an additional grading change at this time. We will evaluate the success of the coming semester to determine when to add Math and Language Arts classes.

Q: What is the goal of the change to a gradeless classroom?

A: We want students to develop an attitude of continuous improvement. Students will spend time reflecting on—and in some cases improving—their work toward mastery of the concepts. We only provide feedback on these assignments so that students have an idea of how to move forward, but are not stifled by the finality of a grade.

Q: How will my child's final quarter grade be determined?

A: First, the student will complete a reflection rubric document in which they assign themselves a grade and identify the work that supports that assessment. Then, they have a brief conference with the teacher to discuss their grade choice. The teacher will provide feedback and help the student to arrive at the most appropriate grade. Then, the grade rubric document is sent home for parents to discuss with the child and sign off on.

Q: What do the levels of mastery mean?

A: During each unit, your child will be working toward mastering the content. At the end of the quarter, your child will be asked to identify what level of mastery they have reached for each unit, along a continuum. They will need to consider how well they understand the ideas, whether they can teach them to another person, and whether they can apply them to new situations. Each level of mastery will be converted into a letter grade at the end of the quarter.